

4-H Programs of Distinction

Program of Distinction Category: Healthy Relationships, Good Decisions

Title of the Program: Project MAGIC

Rationale for Program:

Violence and crime among youth continues to be an enormous problem for families and communities nationwide, with Nevada one of the leading states in per capita rates of youth incarceration. Nevada community need assessments found that few alternatives jail were available for local youth – helping to fuel Nevada's high recidivism rate (Evans, Leone & Neese, 1994). Additional studies of all adjudicated youth in Nevada found this to be a problem for both urban and rural communities (Evans, 1994, 1997). As a result of this and other community studies, Project MAGIC (Making a Group and Individual Commitment) was developed to target entry level and less serious juvenile offenders in rural, urban and Indian Reservation sites in Nevada.

Program Description and Design:

Description: Project MAGIC is a community-based program for high-risk teens and their parents, designed to encourage responsibility and life skills development. The program is collaborative and relies on partnerships with a large number of agencies and organizations for continued success. It addresses juvenile delinquency by building healthy relationships and working on good decision-making skills, especially related to alcohol, tobacco, and other drug (ATOD) use.

Design: The curriculum is based on a resiliency theoretical model and uses an ecological framework that includes youth, parent, community and school components. Youth participate in a 20-hour after-school life skills training program addressing risk and protective factor research related to delinquency. Parents/guardians learn to positively communicate with their teen, manage anger during conflict situations, recognize symptoms of drug and/or alcohol abuse, and positively discipline their children. The parenting component is experiential and teaches positive parenting skills in group parent meetings and/or self-paced lesson plans that can be completed at home. Parents attend four 2-hour sessions.

For further information about the program design and description, see: Smith, M. and Evans, W. (2001) MAGIC Curriculum. Accepted for inclusion in the *National 4-H Experiential Youth Development Juried Curricula*. <http://www.national4-headquarters.gov/curricul/ac23.htm>

Knowledge and Research Base Used for Program Content and Design:

The risk and protective research has led to a resiliency perspective that focuses

on delineating factors/processes that foster positive development and minimize negative outcomes in the presence of risk.

Risk Factors and Juvenile Delinquency: Adjudicated youth are likely to be raised in families with high rates of conflict (West & Farrington, 1973), have a history of low educational achievement (Hawkins & Lishner, 1987), and have personal problems (Beschner, 1985; Hawkins, 1985). Frequent use of drugs is also common among juveniles who engage in delinquent behavior (Elliot & Huizinga, 1984; Centers for Disease Control, 1994; Irwin & Millstein, 1992; Elliot, Huizinga, & Ageton, 1985).

Protective Factors and Juvenile Delinquency: Bernard (1991) outlined protective factors related to individuals (social competence, problem-solving skills, autonomy, and sense of purpose and future), families (caring and support, high expectations for children's behavior, encourage children's participation and responsibility), schools (caring and support, friends, high expectations for all children, support for high achievement, positive frames of children's capabilities, and youth participation and involvement) and communities (environments which facilitate a sense of belonging and control over one's life, availability of resources for healthy human development, high expectations for youth, and opportunities to be contributing members of the community).

Targeted Audience:

The program accepts youth, ages 12-18, with preference given to the younger offenders just beginning to enter the juvenile justice system, or who have low incident rates. The population also includes middle school (or junior high) age youth who are referred by school administrators. The parents/guardians of these referred youth attend parenting classes taught by program staff.

Program Outcomes and Impacts:

The national award-winning Project MAGIC has to date graduated more than 3,000 Nevada families. Other states have purchased this 4-H juried curriculum.

A follow-up study of 100 teen graduates revealed they increased their skills in decision-making, conflict resolution, goal setting and communication (Smith & Evans, 1997, paper presented at the National Rural Institute on Drug & Alcohol Abuse as a national award winner). Another study conducted follow-up interviews of youth one year after graduation from the program, and found they were using program strategies to stay out of trouble with the law (Smith, Usinger & Evans (1999) *International Journal of Offender Therapy and Comparative Criminology* 43(3) 322-337).

Pre-post survey results indicate positive ATOD change as a result of the program. Additional data regarding results from pre-post testing are available from the authors.

The program was recognized in the 2004 USDA Honor Awards for “improving the quality of life for rural Nevada families by helping first-time juvenile offenders build life skills resulting in the reduction of juvenile recidivism rates and large savings to taxpayers.”

Program Evaluation:

Youth: (1) Risk-Protective Factor Pre-post Survey: This survey includes items about school performance, commitment to school, family life, involvement in positive activities, community involvement, and perceptions about ATOD use. A decision-making subscale is also included.

(2) Completion and evaluation of a program portfolio on each youth participant: Student work is compiled into an individual portfolio. A scoring rubric was developed with the help of Far West Labs, an educational consulting group from San Francisco.

Parents: A Parenting Risk-Protective Pre-post Survey asks parents about their child’s school performance, commitment to school, family life, involvement in positive activities, community involvement, and perceptions about ATOD use.

Community: Each MAGIC group completes a community service project. Data is collected including how many volunteer hours were completed and the level of commitment by each youth.

Suggestions for Replication of Program in Other Settings:

Replication to an after-school setting for school-referred students has been successful in several communities. Foster care and parole youth also have been involved successfully in MAGIC groups. A program for incarcerated youth was piloted recently and is in development.

Sources of Funding:

CSREES, Nevada Bureau of Alcohol and Drug Abuse

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References available from the authors